

## Meeting the Counsel General of Azerbaijan Mr. Nasimi Aghayev



*Consul General of Azerbaijan, Mr. Nasimi Aghayev during presentation at UVU*

On October 8, 2018, Utah Valley University (UVU) hosted the Counsel General of Azerbaijan, Nasimi Aghayev, who is also the Dean of the Los Angeles Consular Corps. I had the opportunity to have lunch with Mr. Aghayev where we discussed current topics regarding Azerbaijan. I was very impressed with Mr. Aghayev and his ability to teach others about his country. In our discussions, he informed about trade deals of his country with other nations and how Azerbaijan's president is focused on updating the nation's infrastructure. Mr. Aghayev also gave us a brief history lesson on the importance of Azerbaijan to the Soviet Union and the impact it made as its own republic in 1918 before it was absorbed into the Soviet Union. From this discussion, I learned that Azerbaijan has been one of the leading champions in women's rights, as they were the first nation in the region to grant women the right to vote. They were also the first

secular state in the Muslim world. The discussion we had at lunch lead very nicely into what Mr. Aghayev lecture to the students would be.



*Emma Warner with Mr. Nasimi Aghayev*

During the presentation, Mr. Aghayev spoke about the religious tolerance and harmony that exists today in Azerbaijan. As I stated previously, our discussion at lunch played very well into his lecture, as it gave a historical background as to why Azerbaijan is so successful in their religious tolerance. Their history in being a secular state has put in the mindset of their people that no religion is better than the other is. The demographics of Azerbaijan tell us that 95% of the population is Muslim, with a high amount of those people being Shia. Azerbaijan has the second highest amount of Shia Muslims. In our modern dialogue of the Middle East, one would think that Shia and Sunni Muslims could not get along or live peacefully together. However, Azerbaijan defies this thought. In his lecture, Mr. Aghayev told us how Shia and Sunni Muslims come together and worship a couple times a year. In addition to this Mr. Aghayev told us several stories of

different religious leaders coming together to support each other. One story that stood out to me is when the mother of a local Imam died, while this Imam was grieving and trying to figure out the funeral arrangements, he woke up one morning and on his front lawn was a funeral tent. He asked where it came from, and he was told that it came from the Rabbi of the Jewish neighborhood close by.

I believe that we can learn from Azerbaijan on how people with different views and ideas can live together in peace and harmony. In Azerbaijan, they focus more on what unifies them rather on what differences we have. I think that the opportunities UVU provides in exposing its students to other nations and different ideas will help prepare the future leaders of the world to make our world as peaceful and harmonious as it can be.

*By Emma Warner, UVU student*